

ECA Update March 7, 2016

In this update:

Setting cleanup priorities for 2018

Knox Blogs

DOE starts planning for new Hanford tank farm contract

Tri-City Herald

What's next for Centrifuge workers?

Chillcothe Gazette

Workers begin removing nuclear waste from leaking Hanford tank

AP: Seattle Times

Portman grills DOE Secretary over Obama administration's broken promise to the Piketon community

Highland County Press

Upcoming Events

March 2016

09

Oak Ridge EMSSAB
FY18 Cleanup Planning
Meeting
6:00 PM

March 2016

09

Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on
Energy and Water
Hearing
"The Energy Budget,"
(2:30 PM)
[Visit website.](#)

August 2016

9-10

Third Annual
Intermountain
Energy Summit
Idaho Falls, ID

Bill to Lift Nuclear Moratorium Passes Senate, Now Headed to House

WKMS.Org

An Illustration of the Real Nature of the Nuclear Waste Problem

ANS Nuclear Café

Setting cleanup priorities for 2018

Knox Blogs

March 4, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy will host a March 9 public meeting to discuss priorities and planning for the Oak Ridge cleanup budget in Fiscal Year 2018. The meeting of DOE's Site Specific Advisory Board will begin at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 1 Science.gov Way, in Oak Ridge. That's the location of DOE's Office of Scientific and Technical Information on the east side of town at the intersection of the Oak Ridge Turnpike and Athens Road.

In announcing the meeting, the advisory board said, "Planning for FY 2018 DOE Oak Ridge environmental cleanup projects starts now, and you are invited to learn more about DOE's plans. Come learn about the budget and prioritization process, ask questions, and offer your remarks during our public comment period."

The advisory board's Environmental Management & Stewardship Committee will have "a follow-on discussion" at its March 23 meeting at the DOE Information Center, and the public is invited to attend. It also begins at 6 p.m.

DOE starts planning for new Hanford tank farm contract

Tri-City Herald

March 3, 2016

[LINK](#)

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September 2016

14-15

DOE National Cleanup
Workshop
Hilton Alexandria Mark
Center
Alexandria, VA
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The Department of Energy took an initial step Thursday toward picking the next contractor to be in charge of the Hanford tank farms, asking for information from businesses interested in the work.

Washington River Protection Solutions holds the contract to manage up to 56 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous chemical waste held in underground tanks at the nuclear reservation. Its contract runs through September 2016, but DOE is expected to exercise its option to extend it to September 2018.

The type of contract and period of performance have yet to be determined. The request for information released Thursday is “market research” only, DOE said.

DOE is interested in hearing about potential contracting alternatives and any suggestions for breaking out portions of the work for smallbusiness contracts, including those in such federally recognized categories as women- or veteran-owned small businesses. It also will listen to innovative approaches for doing the work covered by the contract, DOE said.

The contract or contracts to be awarded would cover operation of the tank farm, the 242-A Evaporator, the Effluent Treatment Facility and the 222-S Laboratory, where a separate contractor provides analytic laboratory services.

They also could cover retrieval of waste from underground tanks, installing temporary barriers over tanks and continued implementation of a program to protect workers from chemical vapors.

Construction could include several facilities to support the vitrification plant being built to treat the waste, including a Low Activity Waste Pretreatment System Facility, a Tank Waste Characterization Staging Facility and possible

facilities to support feeding high-level waste directly to the vitrification plant for treatment, bypassing the plant's Pretreatment Facility.

Businesses with the specialized capabilities for the work may take a tour of the tank farms on March 29 and meet with officials one-on-one March 30-31. More information is posted at 1.usa.gov/1TcEG80.

In fall 2015, DOE sent out a similar request for information for other key Hanford work, including cleanup of central Hanford and groundwater, the remaining cleanup along the Columbia River and sitewide infrastructure and services.

The contract for Washington Closure Hanford, which is doing cleanup along the river, ends in September, with most work completed. A new river corridor contract is not planned.

CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. is responsible for central Hanford and groundwater cleanup and its contract expires in September 2018. The contract for Mission Support Alliance, which provides sitewide services, expires in September 2019.

What's next for Centrifuge workers?

Chillcothe Gazette

March 3, 2016

[LINK](#)

PIKETON — With the decision nearly two weeks ago to pull the American Centrifuge Plant off the life support it had been clinging to, it appeared the final chapter in a long and challenging journey had been written.

Since the announcement, however, some members of Ohio's congressional delegation who played a significant role in lobbying to keep the plant from shutting down and taking more than 200 jobs with it this year, have been trying to keep hope alive for that skilled workforce in Piketon.

U.S. Rep. Brad Wenstrup, whose 2nd District includes Pike County, submitted a column this week to the Chillicothe Gazette that serves as a thank you to employees and a criticism of the Department of Energy. DOE made the decision in September to de-fund the American Centrifuge Plant and shift resources set for the centrifuge technology to Oak Ridge, Tennessee for further development. The plant had been operating since then on funding from Centrus Energy, which operates the facility, in hopes that DOE would either have a change of heart or that another use for the plant could be found to keep people in their jobs.

DOE didn't, and Centrus said none of the options examined could be done in a cost-effective or timely enough fashion to prevent the layoffs, the first round of which were scheduled to begin this week.

"Now, the Department of Energy, with a blind eye to global realities, is shutting down our successful operations," Wenstrup wrote. "They plan on dismantling and destroying the machines or shipping them down to Tennessee for storage. We can't just suspend the skilled workforce until it's needed again."

That workforce, he added, needs to have faith that it has a future in the Piketon area.

"My commitment to you is that this is not the end of the story for Piketon," he wrote. "The Piketon facility is a tremendous asset and our skilled workforce in the region is an enviable asset to any company or project. I will continue to work with community leaders to find new opportunities for Southern Ohio."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown made a similar promise when the Centrifuge's closure was announced.

"I can promise these layoffs are not the end of this fight," Brown said. "The families in this community deserve a long-term solution that secures jobs in

the area and supports southern Ohio's economy, and I'll continue to work with the Piketon community to find a long-term solution worthy of these workers."

Neither Wenstrup nor Brown, when asked by the Gazette over the past week, could provide any specifics regarding what such a long-term solution may be, other than to note that the cleanup work at the former Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant in Piketon could offer at least some opportunities.

"We will continue to fight on this, number one, and number two, we're going to get as much assistance as we can for the cleanup, which are good-paying union jobs," Brown told the Gazette last week. "... My focus is on the workers. I'll continue to work for long-term jobs for Pike County, for Scioto County, for Ross County, for the region that is served where the workers come from for these projects."

While those trying to save jobs in Piketon have applauded the efforts of the congressional delegation over recent years, there is frustration from workers and communities in the five-county area that supplies the bulk of the site's workforce after living through an almost annual roller coaster of uncertainty. Unrealized efforts to obtain a \$2 billion loan guarantee earlier this decade to push the Centrifuge into full commercial operation, regular end-of-the-year wrangling over adequate federal dollars to continue the cleanup and Centrifuge operations and a much-hyped announcement in 2009 of plans to bring a large Southern Ohio Clean Energy Park to Piketon that went nowhere have impacted the psyche of the workforce.

Herman Potter, president of United Steel Workers Local 689 that represents several workers at the Centrifuge and cleanup work, said that's why pronouncements about the future fall on questioning ears.

"The union membership over the years have developed a very cynical attitude towards the Department of Energy, especially those from Centrus and the American Centrifuge process," Potter said. "They are in a position

that they need to find more secure work as fast as they can and they are concerned that Centrus, who is still maintaining the (Centrifuge) buildings, may be so reluctant to lose them that they may subtly deter other on-site companies from hiring them.

"We have tried to address that concern by entering in a preferential hiring agreement with (Fluor-BWXT, lead site contractor for the cleanup work) on their behalf and are hopeful that the work grows on the cleanup side."

Potter said the union will continue to be active in other ways, including working toward trying to encourage increased investment in both the cleanup work and the DUF6 project on the Piketon DOE site where more than 800,000 tons of depleted uranium hexafluoride is being converted to depleted uranium oxide. It also is looking to enhance worker skills.

"We are currently working with our USW International union and our district director, Dave McCall, to bring training to the site to enhance the skills and knowledge of our workforce as well as open those same opportunities to members of the communities," Potter said. "This USW local and USW International have not given up on the people that work here and the surrounding community."

Steven Shepherd, executive director of the Southern Ohio Diversification Initiative, said his organization continues to actively pursue new opportunities for skilled workers in Piketon and surrounding communities.

"We're working diligently — with meetings in Brussels (Belgium) and meetings in Washington, D.C. — to try and gain ground and bring other opportunities with an energy park," Shepherd said.

Shepherd, who thinks it's likely that both the cleanup and DUF6 facility will take on some Centrifuge workers and that others from the Centrifuge will go ahead with retirement plans, said DOE has been working with SODI to transfer around 97 acres inside the southwest corner of the perimeter road

around the Piketon site that could be used to attract development to keep and create jobs.

"That's moving along," he said. "We should have a lease on 97 acres this year with the total transfer of the property to SODI next year, so those are good things that are occurring. If it hadn't been for DOE and all the support of the congressional staff, that wouldn't be happening, so we're grateful to DOE and Congress because we're seeing some progress."

Potter, likewise, indicated that the commitment of the region may be getting through to Washington.

"As far as the promises, we are hoping that during this year that the government realizes our dedication to the re-industrialization of the Piketon site," he said. "There are some indications that maybe we are being heard. I am cautiously acknowledging that the DOE seems to be more receptive to our recommendations for efficiency and plans for the site."

Workers begin removing nuclear waste from leaking Hanford tank

AP: Seattle Times

March 4, 2016

[LINK](#)

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Workers have started removing nuclear waste from a leaking tank at the Hanford Site just one day before a state of Washington deadline.

The Tri-City Herald reports that Hanford workers began pumping waste from the nuclear reservation's oldest double-shell tank Thursday afternoon.

The tank is leaking radioactive waste into the space between its inner and outer shells.

The tank contains about 150,000 gallons of radioactive sludge covered by about 650,000 gallons of liquid waste. The liquid could be removed by early next week if things go smoothly, but removing the sludge is more complicated.

The Washington Department of Ecology had ordered the U.S. Department of Energy and its contractor Washington River Protection Solutions to begin emptying the waste by March 4 and finish the work within a year.

Portman grills DOE Secretary over Obama administration's broken promise to the Piketon community

Highland County Press

March 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

After U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-Ohio) secured funding needed to maintain current employment levels for the decontamination and decommissioning work at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant and to maintain operation of the American Centrifuge Plant (ACP) in Piketon, the administration failed to utilize those funds. This week, Portman grilled U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz for his department's failure to use funding provided by Congress and therefore causing layoffs in Piketon.

An excerpt of Portman's comments is below.

"I'm profoundly disappointed in the way you've handled the cleanup at Piketon.

"I asked you if you would come out and take a look at Piketon, and I've asked you at every one of these hearings. I think you would have a different perspective if you would come out and see it.

"It is amazing to me that we are pulling the plug on the one American source, the only American source of enriched uranium which we need for nuclear power, we need for our nuclear Navy ...

we have to have it and we need it for our nonproliferation efforts.

"60 people lost their jobs this week. Their last day of work is going to be tomorrow ... 140 are going to work themselves out of a job as they're forced to deconstruct our best technology, the best centrifuge technology that we have."

"I think it's just wrong and it's going to be very expensive to our taxpayers.

"It would take probably seven years minimum to reconstruct what we have there now. You lose the supply chain, you lose the workers, you lose all this expertise ... As Americans, we should all be concerned about this ... How long would it take to rebuild that capability?"

Bill to Lift Nuclear Moratorium Passes Senate, Now Headed to House

WKMS.Org

March 4, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Senate has passed a bill aiming to lift restrictions on the building of nuclear reactors in the Commonwealth.

SB 89 changes requirements for facilities to have plans of permanent nuclear waste disposal on-site.

"The moratorium has strictly to do with expended fuel, the waste and it has to do with the storage of the waste," said Sen. Danny Carroll (R-Paducah). "As law stands now, if you have a nuclear reactor you have to have a plan for the disposal of that waste. The nuclear moratorium, if it were to be lifted, simply means that the material could be stored on site

Carroll, the bill's sponsor, says the loss of coal jobs and production has pushed an increase in the burning of natural gas, which is at historically low valuation. But, he says, Kentucky needs to diversify its portfolio if and when that market changes.

"And so we're going to be paying these really high prices and we're going to be looking for an alternative source of energy," said Carroll.

"We're gonna be scrambling to get this process started to get the moratorium lifted and it's going to take years once it is lifted to actually to get through regulatory environment to get to the point where we can actually build nuclear reactors in the state."

Carroll says energy companies like the Tennessee Valley Authority may be interested in constructing and operating a small-modular nuclear reactor near the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant once the moratorium is lifted.

State Rep. Gerald Watkins is sponsoring a similar bill that allows reactor construction only in specific areas. Carroll says if that version passes, he'll continue to push for a full moratorium lift in years ahead.

An Illustration of the Real Nature of the Nuclear Waste Problem

ANS Nuclear Café

February 24, 2016

[LINK](#)

Despite progress in Scandinavia on nuclear waste disposal, and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's conclusion that Yucca Mountain in Nevada would meet all the (impeccable) technical requirements, a large fraction of the public continues to believe that the lack of resolution of the nuclear waste problem is due to technical, as opposed to purely political, factors. That is, that "we really don't know what to do with the waste", and there is still no acceptable technical solution.

The recent example discussed below illustrates very clearly the real reason why the waste issues remain unresolved, and just how intractable the political problem is.

DOE's proposed North Dakota borehole studies

The Department of Energy has proposed a scientific study that involves drilling deep boreholes, 16,000 feet down into crystalline rock under North Dakota. The purpose of the project would be to look at the general behavior of deep boreholes in crystalline rock. Such (general) scientific knowledge could be used for oil/gas drilling, geothermal projects, and also potentially for disposal of certain types of high-level radioactive waste.

The DOE is not considering the use of boreholes for spent or recycled nuclear fuel, but may consider them for disposal of concentrated defense wastes such as cesium or strontium capsules.

Also, the DOE has made it clear that this project is for general scientific study only. No radioactive materials will be used in the studies, and no plans or proposals are being made to actually dispose of any radioactive wastes in boreholes, in North Dakota or elsewhere.

Political reaction in North Dakota

Even though this does not involve any proposal for disposing of radiological material, the political reaction in North Dakota to the DOE project has been swift and strong. Local officials complained of being blindsided by the news of the proposed DOE project, and of not being kept in the loop. One stated that "half the county would have been there to say no" to the project if it were aired at a local meeting (just due to the remote possibility that it could lead to radiological waste disposal). Another stated that he does not see how such a project could provide any benefit to the region. Not long after word got out about the project, nearly 300 local residents packed a county commission meeting to air their mostly negative views about the project. The DOE found

itself on the defensive, repeating the point that the project was only for basic science.

Political vs. technical basis

Given how little the local public and policy makers actually knew about the project, not to mention the fact that it was purely a basic science project that did not involve radiological material or any kind of proposal for nuclear waste disposal, it is clear that there was no technical basis for any outright opposition. It was an immediate, knee-jerk, purely political reaction, one that clearly shows the degree of fear and political prejudice against all things nuclear that is held by much of the public, almost everywhere.

One very telling remark by one of the local politicians, which illustrates this point, was that “what bothers them” is that the study might find that the location IS suitable for nuclear waste disposal, and that “you never know about the government”. Finding that the site is suitable, and perhaps then proposing waste burial, is some form of betrayal? Heaven forbid that the government should try to dispose of nuclear waste in a suitable location. The idea being that if the location were suitable, a repository would somehow inflict harm on the local population? What (technical) definition of “suitable” is this?

The DOE (defensively) responded to such sentiments by stressing that no nuclear waste repository site would ever go forward without local consent. It also repeated the message that this study is only about basic scientific research, and is not a formal evaluation for suitability for nuclear waste disposal. On this (one) point, the locals may be right that the DOE is not being entirely forthcoming. The possibility of using such boreholes for nuclear waste disposal IS on the DOE’s mind. But the real shame is that the political situation is such that one cannot even admit to studying possible solutions to the nuclear waste problem.

These reactions are particularly frustrating given that the state has actively welcomed oil fracking operations, which probably entail pollution (ground

water) risks that are far larger than any associated with deep borehole disposal of certain radiological wastes (cesium and strontium capsules with ~30-year half-lives, certainly). There clearly seems to be a double standard.

There are other examples of purely knee-jerk, political opposition to nuclear waste disposal sites. One other example is the intermediate waste repository proposed for a location in Ontario near Lake Huron (and also near a nuclear power plant). Despite the fact that all the scientific analyses, as well as the (conservative) regulator, concluded that the risks were negligible (certainly far smaller than those posed by a myriad of other waste/industrial sites near the shores of the Great Lakes), the project is now being delayed, and may be rejected, due to a tremendous negative political response. A response aided and abetted by many U.S. politicians (from Michigan, etc.) who apparently believe that there are political points to be scored fighting this (imaginary) threat. Another example is the (absurd) suggestion by nuclear opponents in Wisconsin that removing the state's ban on nuclear power plant construction would somehow cause the state to be considered for the nation's nuclear waste repository.

What to do?

The intent of this article is to give an example that illustrates how the problems associated with resolving the nuclear waste disposal problem are political, vs. technical, in nature, and just how difficult the political problems are. I don't claim to know the answer. The local political support for a repository in southeast New Mexico (and just across the border in Texas) offers some cause for hope, but the problem always occurs at the state level, and it is not clear if New Mexico or Texas will support a repository.

I will share one thought, however, about a potential source of these public attitudes. Many of the messages about nuclear waste that come from the industry itself or from politicians that (ostensibly) support nuclear power and/or repository programs actually have the effect of increasing the public's fear of nuclear waste.

One example of this is all the extreme measures the industry takes to keep the public “safe” from nuclear waste, perhaps in an effort to appease or assuage public fears. But if you treat the material like it is extremely, and uniquely, dangerous, then the public will believe that it actually is. Thus, these efforts may actually have the reverse effect.

But a more important example of counter-productive messages is when politicians that support a repository (e.g., Yucca Mountain) try to gain political support for the project by instilling a sense of significant need or urgency. They argue that a repository (or resolution of the nuclear waste problem in general) is important or urgent because having the waste continue to be stored at nuclear plant sites is a significant problem or risk. In most cases, the politicians in question are from states with nuclear power plants.

How would you react to these arguments if you lived in the state that has the proposed repository location? These politicians are saying that they want the waste out of their state because it is so dangerous. And they want to bring all of the nation’s waste to your state!

I realize that there would be problems with the exact opposite tack. If the waste is not dangerous at all, why bother with a repository (or moving it to a single, central location)? All I’m saying is that the arguments need to be presented carefully, in a cool-headed fashion.

We need to state the truth, i.e., that the risks are very low, but storing or disposing of the waste in a single location would make the risks even lower. And, after all, the waste needs to be finally disposed of at some point in any event, and having 50 repositories doesn’t make economic or environmental sense. Another (non-fear-based) argument could involve the fact that we want to remove the waste from the plant sites because that would allow those (valuable) sites to be put to good use.